HOW DEPLOYMENT IMPACTS FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Yuko Whitestone, Ph.D.
DoD Office of Family Policy/Children and Youth

Background

- A congressional report on a comprehensive assessment of the impacts of parental deployment on children (Section 571 of the FY 2010 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA))
- Assessment Method: Extensive review of civilian & military research literature (170+ studies)
- Assessment requirements:
  - Age of children (0-18yo): preschool, school age, and adolescents
  - Family composition: SM+ civilian spouses, dual military couples, and single parents.
  - Impact of multiple deployments
  - Children of the Fallen, Wounded, Injured, and Ill
  - Risk behaviors (child abuse, substance abuse, etc.)

Deployment and Children

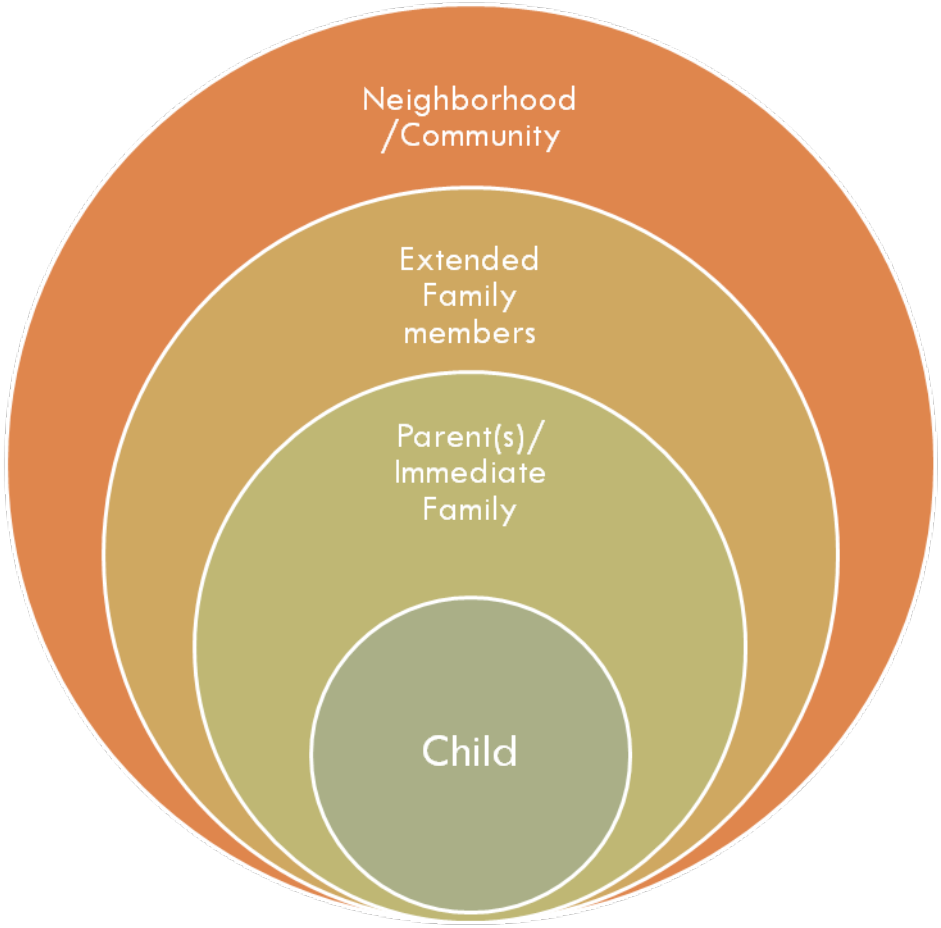
- 1.8 million military children [1]
- Over 210, 000 military children aged 0 to 18 years have one or both parents deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. [2]
- Age distribution of children of deployed Service members: 0-5: 43%; 6-12: 37%; 13-18: 20%. [2]
- Over 41,000 children experienced their deployed Service member parents wounded, injured, or fell ill.
- Over 3,700 children ages 0-18yo have lost their Service member parents. [2]
- Dual military couples with children: 2.8 % of AD; 1.4% of RC [1]
- Single parents: 146,000 single parents -- 5.3% of AD; 8.6% of RC [1]

Data source: 1. The 2009 Demographic Report: Profile of the Military Community; 2. DMDC (Data as of March, 2010)

Deployment and Military Families

- Unique Demands of military family life in addition to combat deployment (frequent relocation, routine deployments, unaccompanied assignments, organizational norms and culture, risk of injury and death of the Service member)
- High deployment tempo (multiple deployments, short dwell time)
- Reliance on Guard and Reserve members
- Returning Service members with Severe wounds/injuries

Children's Coping with Parental Deployment



Child Outcomes in Recent Studies by Child Age

Child Outcome	Age		
	Preschool	Elementary School	Adolescents
Externalized behaviors (Aggression, behavioral problems at home or at school; defiant behaviors)	Chartrand et al. (2008) Orthner & Rose (2005) Barker & Berry (2009)	Chandra et al. (2010) Flake et al. (2009) Lester et al. (2010)	Chandra et al. (2010a) Chandra et al. (2010b) Heubner & Mancini (2005) Heubner et al. (2007) Lester et al. (2010)
Internalized behaviors (depressive symptoms, anxiety, withdrawal, sadness)	Barker & Berry (2009) Orthner & Rose (2005)	Chandra et al. (2010) 11-17yo Orthner & Rose (2005) Lincoln, et al. (2010)	Wong & Gerras(2010) Heubner &Mancini (2005) Chandra, et al. (2010a) Lester et al. (2010)
Academic performance		Lincoln et al. (2010) Flake et al. (2009)	Chandra et al. (2010a) Chandra et al. (2010b)
Peer relationships			Wong & Gerras (2010) Chandra et al. (2010a)

Note: Only published research studies examining data from OEF/OIF related deployments are included in this table.

Main Findings1: General

- Children's reactions vary by age, developmental stage, and other individual/family factors.
- The majority of military children demonstrated a high level of resilience to successfully cope with parental deployments.
- Though young children are most impacted by parental deployment, recent studies have found that adolescent girls were more likely to encounter more challenges overall than boys (Chandra et al., 2010; Lester et al., 2010).
- The non-deployed parent/caregiver's psychological health is positively associated with children's successful coping with deployment-related stress (Chandra et al., 2010; Flake, et al., 2009; Heubner et al., 2007; Lester et al., 2010).
- The cumulative length of deployments was significantly associated with child adjustment issues (Chandra et al., 2010; Engle et al., 2006; Lester et al., 2010; Wong & Gerras, 2010).

Main Findings 2: Special populations

- Longitudinal studies are needed to understand…
  - how parental death impacts children's childhood
  - the long-term effects of living with the wounded Service member parents
- Children of wounded Service members are at risk for emotional and behavioral problems (Cozza et al., 2005; Cozza et al., 2010).
- Though recent studies have found the linkage between parental deployment and the increase in child maltreatment(Gibbs et al., 2007; Rentz et al., 2007), the generalizability of the findings need to be validated with more representative samples.

Main Findings 3: Family diversity

- Children of dual-military couples and single family parents have not been the primary subject of assessment or research.
- There is no systematic research on how a specific family structure interacts with deployment-related stress in the process of child adjustment.

Large-Scale Research Efforts on the impact of deployment on children

Title	Sponsor/Research Organization	Timeline (data collection)	Objectives
Military Family Life Project	DoD Military Community & Family Policy; Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)	First wave: May 2010; second wave: One year from first wave.	This longitudinal survey invites 100,000 spouses across the Services and covers stress, usage of support programs, impact of deployment on spouses and children. Data is partially compatible with the Active Duty Spouse Surveys in 2006 and 2008.
The 2010 April Status of Forces Survey of Active Duty Members (SOFS-A)	Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC)	June 2010	DMDC fields SOFS four times a year with Active Duty members across the four Services. In the June 2010 SOFS-A, 40,000 Service members whose civilian spouses were invited to the first-wave of MFLP survey will be included in the sample. This will help us understand the impact of deployment on spouses and children from Service members' perspectives.
Millennium Cohort Study (Family component)	DoD Center for Deployment Health Research	June 2010	The Millennium Cohort Family Study specifically focuses on the impact of deployments on psychological and physical health of military families, including children and spouses. The survey was sent to 10,000 spouses across DoD.
Longitudinal Assessment of Family Readiness	RAND sponsored by Defense Centers for Excellence (DCOE) for Psychological Health and TBI	TBD	RAND will conduct DoD-wide survey of 4,500 families. In addition to Service members and spouses, children 11 years of age or older will be interviewed. This study is designed to better understand the impact of deployments on psychological well-being of families of deployed Service members. This longitudinal survey study will collect data from the same families over 36 months.

Recommendations/Current Status

- Coordinate among the Services, Office of Secretary of Defense (OSD), other federal agencies, and partnering universities doing similar research to reduce duplication of research efforts and promote collaboration among researchers.
- Create a communication channel or centralized repository for tracking planned research projects, those in progress, and active research solicitations.
- Assess the needs, concerns, and challenges facing families with children using existing data such as DMDC surveys.
- Be a critical consumer whenever using research products.
- Ongoing research efforts increasingly use longitudinal research designs. – Stay tuned.